



We are uncovering better ways of incorporating Sustainability into Project, Program and Portfolio Management. Through this work we have come to value:

Benefits realization over metrics limited to time, scope, and cost

[How we measure success]

Value for many over value of money

[How we measure value]

The long-term impact of our projects over their immediate results

[Where we keep our focus]

Managing economic, social, and environmental parameters over managing only economic parameters

[How we enlarge our considerations]

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

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The Sustainability Manifesto for Projects

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Preface

The Sustainability Manifesto for Projects contains the point of view of four international and independent-minded project practitioners about sustainability and projects. They met and worked virtually together in the first months of 2016 and felt the common need to explain, to clarify, and to increase awareness and knowledge about what global sustainability means and how it is concretely applicable in project, program and portfolio management.

During their daily work and experience, they often noticed misinformation, misunderstandings, and false beliefs about the subject and felt the need to fix this gap.

Projects are the way the future is built. Through projects, visions are realized, companies grow, and sometimes even dreams come true. Your project is your legacy and is your opportunity to shape a better, sustainable world. One that could last. Make no mistake: the world is counting on you.

What is global sustainability?

Global sustainability is a mind-set that privileges the long-term impact rather than just immediate outcomes, the future rather than just the present, the next generations rather than just self-interest. It is about balance. It is about taking the right actions today, at the social, environmental, and economical levels, to ensure that tomorrow will still exist. It is about legacy and commitment. It is about being an active driver instead of a mere spectator. It is an attitude, and a corporate and an individual responsibility.

It is the concept of being in business forever (Schendler, 2010). If a company thinks and acts as if it is in business forever, it makes sustainable decisions, and launches and measures projects based on long-term thinking.

It is about improving, thriving, evolving, growing, nourishing, caring, increasing, enriching, and advancing the quality of resources, deliverables, working environment, suppliers, relationships, economic, social and environmental results, products and services of projects, and of the context where projects are developed and executed.

Global sustainability is not thinking that the end of the project is the handover to operations. It is not a niche market, an inviting brand, a “new age” business, green washing, a manipulative marketing strategy, or conditioning children education. And importantly, sustainability is not just about the environment. It is not a one-off activity. It is not only a section of a governance model or of a sustainability report.

What is environmental sustainability?

Environmental sustainability supports the concept of being in business forever focusing on the environment. Examples of such efforts are conservation, lowered pollutants, and ecologically-responsible decisions.

It is using resources in abundance when renewable and saving them when non renewable, protecting and improving biodiversity, air, water, soil, climate, health, and well-being, cancelling the production of waste through the adoption of continuous and closed production cycles and connected supply chain.

It is the respectful and fair use of the resources of the planet, allowing current needs to be satisfied without compromising the needs of future generations. It is about recognizing that we do not own the planet but are instead responsible for preserving it. It is about protecting home.

Environmental sustainability is not limited to ideas such as buying carbon credits, or focused only in gaining credentials in sustainability. It is also not limited to “going green” nor it is only about recycling.

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What is social sustainability?

Social sustainability is long-term decision making that takes humans and groups of humans (communities, laborers, children, etc.) into account, and their long-term interests.

It is protecting and improving human rights, rights of the society, rights of the workers, and rights of the customers. It is committing to a durable well-being of the society. It is resolving conflicts in a win-win environment. It is nourishing personal and professional relationships. It involves considering the larger impact of our actions, and the impact on the larger community.

Social sustainability is not making statements like “we care about people” and putting pictures of children running in fields of daisies on your web page. This is a surface “start” but without follow through, it is greenwashing. Without extending your social goals through your supply chain, you have not accomplished social sustainability.

What is economic sustainability?

Economic sustainability is long-term thinking in economic decisions to support the mission of the organization.

It is efficiently applying your available resources, and raising efficiency, and often effectiveness, over time, as exemplified by (Anderson, 2011). It is increasing the economic well-being of the community and of society.

It is the transparent and optimal use of resources, able to generate growth without compromising the ability to produce in the future. It is about benefits in the long-term. It is about creating value through the supply chain and creating the conditions for a continuous stream of revenue without neglecting the other dimensions of sustainability.

Economic sustainability is not focusing on short-term results to the long-term viability of the firm. It is not exploiting resources for personal advantage. It is not poisoning the market with unfair behaviors, products, results, and services. Being economically sustainable is not counter the ideas of generating profit. It focuses on years and decades rather than weeks or ends of fiscal periods. It is not anti-competition but in favor of collaboration and fair trade.

What is global sustainability in projects?

Global sustainability in projects is linking strategy to operations with projects, recognizing that projects are indeed the connecting gear between strategy and operations. It is a mind-set of long-term thinking beyond the handover to operations, considering also the steady-state use of the products, results and services of the project, their by-products, and their final destination.

It is setting a holistic strategy that is long term focused economically, environmentally and socially. It is establishing sustainable objectives, principles and values and sticking to them. It is participation and involvement. It is creativity, innovation, curiosity, exploration, and invention, and

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applying these attributes to more effective and efficient project with outcomes that consider economic, environmental, and social bottom lines.

It concerns using projects as vehicles of sustainability, through sustainable practices and conduct, and also as shapers of a sustainable world.

The benefits realization of projects needs to address the longer term goals of the organization and of the broader community.

Global sustainability in projects is not limited to projects which have green objectives, because they involve, for example, saving a species or building a wind farm. It is a fact that these projects are focused on an environmental concern, and the same sustainability thinking must be applied on these projects. It is not just about consideration of sustainability regarding risk management, or health and safety. It is not a side benefit to sell the project.

Benefits of sustainability in projects

Benefits of sustainability in projects are sweeping and numerous: better risk identification, better connection to strategy, better engagement of people who have a sustainable mind-set, and documented improvements in long-term economics for the organizations, which adopt these principles.

Addition of sustainability in projects helps extend the planning horizon, identification of a broader set of stakeholders, and improved buy-in from that broader set of stakeholders.

When a project takes sustainability into account, they create a more solid work product, something constructed for the long term. Less waste, better treatment of workers, better alignment with organizational goals. Also, a sustainable project means that decisions around change management are easier, as we have constraints and assumptions that help us make critical decisions.

Projects which take sustainability into account make better use of resources and consequent cost savings, risk mitigation and maximization of opportunities, and more motivation and engagement from workforce. Ultimately, they provide for a lasting business.

Final thoughts

Our vision is that, in a near future, all projects are geared to be sustainable and sustainably managed, and that this has become part of the culture, of the knowledge, and of the experience of the millions of project management practitioners.

These are our projects. This is our discipline. This yields our future. We owe it to ourselves to build a better outcome.

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